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# SACRED JOURNEY



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THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ FEBRUARY/MARCH 2009

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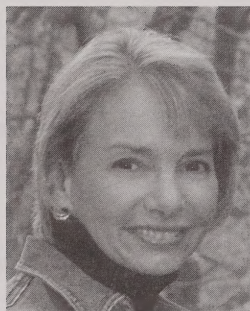
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## Courting Change

*Janet M. Haag*



We have only to look around us to observe the cycle of life unfolding. The process is one marked by change, sometimes precipitated by a crisis, obliging us to move in different directions, to adapt to unexpected circumstances, to explore previously uncharted courses. We are reminded in the ancient wisdom of Taoism that it is precisely in the interplay between opposing energies that life achieves harmony and balance. Crisis is a time of both danger and opportunity. We decide which of these possibilities will prevail at any given moment.

Like so many individuals and organizations across the world during current crises, Fellowship in Prayer is being compelled to change, to re-balance in a way that will keep us faithful to our mission while enabling us to maximize the human and financial resources at our disposal. Following prayerful reflection, assessment and dialogue, we have embraced a strategic plan that among other things includes changes to our publication. Our goal is

*Janet M. Haag is the Executive Director of Fellowship in Prayer.*



to continue to bring to the world the sacred wisdom and inspiration from diverse religious traditions, needed and valued now more than ever.

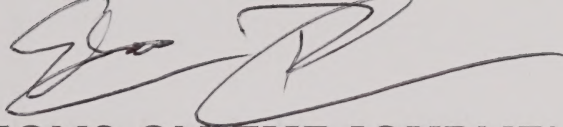
The next issue of *SACRED JOURNEY* will mark the transition from a bi-monthly to a quarterly publication. The number of pages will be increased from forty-eight to sixty-four. We trust the additional pages will enable you to continue to savor the journal's contents while you wait a little longer for your next issue to arrive. The journal will retain its portable size but internal templates will be redesigned, a different font will be utilized and other minor adjustments may be made to give the journal a more contemporary appearance. Finally, to assist us in meeting the steadily increasing costs of production and postage, there will be a modest subscription rate increase for the first time in eight years. Effective April, 2009, the cost of a one-year domestic subscription will be \$20, with a two-year subscription at \$35. Please note the renewal date for current subscribers will be extended by one additional issue to offset the change in the publication schedule. *SACRED JOURNEY* can now be purchased online at our new Fellowship in Prayer website, [www.fellowshipinprayer.org](http://www.fellowshipinprayer.org). The journal will be made available in electronic format.

Indeed, change is always afoot. We can find it disconcerting when what was once familiar and predictable is no longer either familiar or predictable, but it can also be exciting. We are challenged to be creative, to generate fresh ideas and entertain new options. You are welcome to engage with us in the change process occurring at FiP. We love hearing from you, so please feel free to call or email us with your questions, comments or insights.

Eboo Patel, our featured interviewee in this issue, has made it his life's work to build relationships among young people from diverse religious backgrounds by "inspiring, resourcing and networking" them for interfaith service. Through working together for the betterment of the community, these young people discover that what divides us is not nearly as great as what unites us—that values like hospitality, compassion and service are hallmarks of all great religions.

Similarly, Fellowship in Prayer has long stood on the conviction that a divided world will become a community at peace when people at the grassroots level embrace the giftedness of religious pluralism and the transformative power of prayer. If each of us were to bring just one new subscriber to *SACRED JOURNEY*—we would immediately double our journal's readership with the prospect of opening yet more minds and hearts to understanding and appreciating the radical goodness of life—or the radical goodness of God—rooted in diverse spiritual beliefs, values and practices. Margaret Mead once wrote, "Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world—indeed it's the only thing that ever has." Let's make it a point to count ourselves among them!



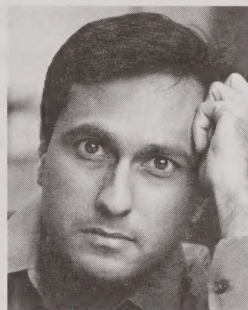


# COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY



## An Interview with Eboo Patel

*Eboo Patel is an American Muslim from India. He is a Rhodes scholar and an author—a man whose life journey has led him to envision and found Interfaith Youth Core, a movement in which young people come together to serve their communities, learning to respect and appreciate one another's religious traditions in the process. Eboo's book, Acts of Faith, is his account of coming of age and his discovery that interfaith cooperation can open the way to a new world order in which diverse traditions are embraced as "mutually enriching rather than mutually exclusive." Fellowship in Prayer is delighted to be the lead partner in bringing Eboo Patel to Princeton to speak on April 2, 2009 and in co-hosting an Interfaith Youth Day of Service in the greater Princeton area on April 19<sup>th</sup>. Eboo offers a refreshing, new perspective on the faith divide and leads the way toward a more hopeful future.*



**Fellowship in Prayer: Would you tell us about the Interfaith Youth Core and what motivated you to found this organization?**

**Eboo Patel:** The Interfaith Youth Core is a Chicago-based nonprofit organization that is catalyzing, resourcing and networking the global interfaith youth movement. I think I was led to found this organization with the recognition that when I was coming of age in the 90's a lot of the violence in the world was being done by young people in the name of God. I realized they were trying to dominate

and suffocate people from different religions. I also realized that the people from the 20<sup>th</sup> century that I most admired were people of faith, diverse faiths. Among them were Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Jane Addams, Abraham Joshua Heschel and Malcolm X, people I admired for building bridges across different faiths to foster better understanding and serve the common good. Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I believed that part of my calling, as an American, an Indian and a Muslim, was to try to build on their legacy—gathering young people from diverse faiths to lead a movement toward what we call religious pluralism.

### **How did you know this was your calling?**

It kind of inched up on me and exploded within me at the same time—which is how I think everybody finds their calling. One day you wake up and you realize that something has happened, that everything in your life has led you to this moment and this realization. That's how I felt late one night in 1998 while at the United Religious Initiative Conference at Stanford. I asked, "Why isn't there an organization that brings young people from different faiths together to build understanding and serve others?" My answer was, "Maybe I am supposed to build that organization." I believe my own faith journey, my work in the diversity movement, my work in the service learning movement, all of my experiences converged in bringing me to this conclusion. I wanted to be part of a movement that would bring spirituality, diversity and social action together in a concrete way. I feel unbelievably blessed and privileged to be able to wake up every morning and do the work that is my calling, one that I

feel impacts peoples' lives in profound and positive ways. My prayer is that I continue to be able to do this work and that it will continue to have a positive impact.

### **Would you tell us a little more about your faith journey?**

I grew up in a household in which Islam was important in an abstract kind of way. For many years my family engaged in daily religious rituals even though we didn't always get to Friday prayers. My mother emphasized that Islam is a diverse religion. Any religion with more than a billion adherents spread across eighty countries and a history going back over a thousand years has to be diverse. My father pointed out that my great grandfather was a deeply devoted Ismaili who was constantly doing volunteer service. What happened for me when I was at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign is that I started asking questions about why some people had to eat their dinner out of garbage cans. I discovered I had a thirst for justice. I further discovered my desire to address this question wasn't only a political one, it was also a deeply spiritual one. I began a spiritual journey to discover what it meant to be human among other humans in a world of inequality in which people were hurting and faith was nowhere to be found in the diversity discussion. The first faith-based movement I happened upon was the Catholic Worker Movement and I thought it bridged heaven and earth. The Catholic Worker became my community. I spent a whole summer in 1995 traveling through Catholic Worker Houses in America. I was profoundly inspired and moved by how their interpretation of their faith led them to serve with humility and love. Their



Houses of Hospitality were cultures of kindness. I wasn't Catholic and I realized I didn't want to be Catholic, so I made an internal journey into what my interpretation of the Divine is and how I might act on that interpretation. My journey took me through the study of different religions, including Buddhism, and ultimately, back to Islam, primarily through the example of my grandmother.

This story about my grandmother is in my book, *Acts of Faith*, but let me tell it to you now. I went to India in the summer of 1998 with my best friend Kevin who is a Jewish poet. When our mentor and friend Brother Wayne Teasdale heard about our plan to start an interfaith youth organization, he said, "You have to go to Dharamsala and tell His Holiness, the Dalai Lama about the Interfaith Youth Core. He is going to love the idea and you have to get his blessing before you do anything else." During this trip, Kevin and I stayed at the home of my grandmother; she is a very devoted Muslim. When we first arrived and



she saw Kevin's books on Judaism, she asked, "You are a Jew?" To Kevin's nod, she replied, "*Mash'Allah*," meaning "Thanks be to God." Then she said, "He is *Ahl al-Kitab*," a "person of the book," which is the way Muslims refer to their Abrahamic cousins: Christians and Jews. My grandmother's most important lesson to me came when I woke up one morning and saw a strange woman in the house. I asked my grandmother, "Who is this woman?" My grandmother replied, "I don't know her real name but the leader of our local Muslim prayer house has brought her here because she is being abused by her father and her uncle and so we will take care of her until we can send her somewhere safe." I kind of scolded my grandmother for taking on this dangerous task. "How can you take this refugee into your home? Isn't this putting everybody in danger?" My grandmother shot me a look with arched eyebrows and asked, "Do you have any idea what I am trying to do here?" This may be the hundredth person who has come here and been safe. Then she took out an old shoe box full of Polaroids, pictures of all the women refugees she had taken in, refugees from broken homes, refugees from abusive partners and abusive families. I asked my grandmother, "Why do you do all this work? Why have you taken in all these women over the last fifty years?" She looked a little shocked and said simply, "I am a Muslim. This is what Muslims do."

This was a huge consciousness awakening for me. In the earlier meeting with the Dalai Lama, he had talked to Kevin and me about being a good Jew and a good Muslim. Of course, at that time I was trying to be a good Buddhist and feeling like a failure at it because halfway through my first full breath at meditation, a thought would enter my mind or the "*Ya Ali, Ya Muhammad*" of Muslim prayer.

After hearing the Dalai Lama and Kevin talk about Judaism and Buddhism, I started forming a different theory about my own Buddhist meditation, thinking it may have inadvertently returned me to Muslim prayer. So, here I was wondering what it would mean to reconnect with the tradition of my ancestors and there was my grandmother providing the example for me. The following summer when I became a Doctoral student at Oxford and started studying Islam again, what I came to understand was how deeply engrained in Islam were the social justice values on which I was trying to build my organization and also how deeply engrained was the broader value of religious pluralism.

**You talk quite a bit about the faith line that divides us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what can we as individuals and as faith communities do to address this issue?**

I would like to invite your readers to become what we at the Interfaith Youth Core call Interfaith Ambassadors. These are people who are able to tell a twofold story. First they talk about the values that different religions share. A lot of people, secular humanists and religious believers, think there is nothing that unites Islam and Christianity and that is just not true. The truth is that values like hospitality, mercy, service and compassion are central to all traditions. Telling people that one of the primary teachings of Islam is that if you are merciful to those on earth, the one who is in heaven will be merciful to you helps people realize this Muslim teaching is similar to the Golden Rule. Just telling this first part of the story provides an opening to people who are too often locked in the clash of civilizations mindset.



“The greatest problem facing the 21st century is the problem of the *faith divide*. The faith divide does not separate Muslims from Christians, Gentile from Jew, or Believer from Nonbeliever. The *faith divide* separates people who want to live together as brothers from people who want to perish together as fools.”

~Eboo Patel

The second part of being an Interfaith Ambassador is telling the story of how people from different faiths have worked together to create a world of equality and dignity for all people. For example, you have Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., a Christian, learning from the example of Gandhi who is a Hindu, and doing many of the most important civil rights marches, like the one in Selma, with a great Jewish leader, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and then, having profound correspondence with the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn. So, to tell the story of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. as a faith hero who engaged in interfaith cooperation is a way to say to people, “Look we are not doing anything new here but what we are doing is extending a tradition of interfaith cooperation that is very important to all of the other things that we do.” There is then a next level which is what we at Interfaith

Youth Core call being an Interfaith Bridge Builder. This involves helping people start projects that bring those from different faiths together to do something concrete to serve those in need. This is what Interfaith Youth Core is about. How do you bring people from different religions together to build houses? To tutor children? To act on their shared values?

**You have said that you don't talk much about prayer or questions of salvation at the Interfaith Youth Core because these are part of the private dimension of faith. How do you build a bridge between the private and public dimensions of faith?**

At Interfaith Youth Core we think the significant public dimension of faith is expressed through the shared values of social action, mercy, hospitality and service. All faith communities in the world embrace these. The bridge between the private and public dimensions is the faith inspiration to act on these shared values. We believe faith communities should have sacred space where what goes on in the public square doesn't interfere. We need to respect what goes on in these different sacred spaces and how the private dimension inspires work in the public arena, but our main purpose at Interfaith Youth Core is to focus on the public dimension of faith.

**There are those who maintain it is impossible to bring people of different faiths together to pray, given their different theologies. What do you think?**

Organizationally, we don't deal specifically with this question. Before I started Interfaith Youth Core, I spent

time doing research on what other interfaith agencies were doing. I didn't want to replicate what was already being done in terms of bringing people from different religions together for prayer and shared sacred practices. There are plenty of places from the high temples to spiritual leaders, to various magazines, radio and TV programs where seekers can go to get help with this part of their journey. I saw a gap in terms of a movement that focused specifically and uniquely on young people from different religions and social action. At Interfaith Youth Core, we are very committed to our mission of bringing young people from different religions together to act on their shared values through serving others.

**In your book, *Acts of Faith*, you wrote that it was important both to you and your wife, Shehnaz, to be with a person who shared “the same language of prayer.” What do you mean by this phrase and why do you believe this is important?**

The language of prayer that I am talking about is Arabic and the reason it is important to me is because I grew up viewing this as Holy. My mother would whisper Arabic prayers in my ears. It was a powerful connection for me that Shehnaz's parents had done the same. Shehnaz has reminded me, however, there are multiple dialects within a language and those differences also need to be respected within the unity of the broader tradition. In my book I mention having experienced blessed relationships with women from different religious backgrounds and learning so much about their traditions. But ultimately, I wanted to be with a person who had the same experience as me. Other people may consider different experiences important. For



instance, they may find having a belief in God or practicing some kind of spirituality is what matters. I respect all of that. This was my experience—a story of bonding a lot of believers share. The most interesting comments I have gotten on my book have come from people who have had similar love journeys. Love journeys and faith journeys have a lot in common.

**Do you have a favorite prayer to share with us—perhaps one your mother used to whisper in your ear?**

Yes, it is probably the most common prayer, *Bismillah Ar-Rahman, Ar-Raheem*, which means, “In the name of God, the all merciful, the ever merciful.”

**If you had the opportunity to ask people the world over to join together in prayer, what would you ask them to pray for?**

To be merciful to each other.

**Thank you so much, Eboo!**

# PRAYERS



## A Water Prayer

Precious Lord of Life,

Flow through me

that I might not take this body vessel  
for granted, that I might appreciate fully  
floaters in my eye, the sound of vertebra  
popping into place, the cupping at the back  
of my knee, the metatarsal's slope.

Flow between us

that I might know the soul  
of others, see their eyes and in the mirror  
there find my own tender needs, the edge  
of my own fear, my own tentative hope that we  
might give each other permission  
to live lightly, freely, fully in the darker parts  
of life that scare us so if we cannot touch  
them together.

Let us flow in you

like leaves on the river, the budding,  
greening, turning, the letting go flow  
of you, folding us  
in your secret: I AM, you are, and so  
are We.

~ Gene Laskowski

*Gene Laskowski holds an M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary, New York, and a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. He writes and teaches in Ann Arbor, MI.*

## Nayaz (Healing Prayer)

Beloved Lord, Almighty God!  
Through the rays of the sun,  
Through the waves of the air,  
Through the All-pervading Life in space,  
Purify and revivify me, and I pray,  
Heal my body, heart and soul.  
Amen.

*~ Hazrat Inayat Kahn  
A Sufi Prayer*

## Caring for One Another

Let us take care of the children, for they have a long way to go. Let us take care of the elders, for they have come a long way. Let us take care of those in between, for they are doing the work.

*~ African Prayer  
Prayers for Healing*

## Through Our Hands

Make us worthy, Lord, to serve our fellow men throughout the world who live and die in poverty and hunger. Give them through our hands, this day their daily bread, and by our understanding love, give peace and joy.

*~ Pope Paul VI*



# *Tikkun Olam* (Repairing the World)

*Annie Tucker*



The great Hasidic Rabbi Solomon ben Meir ha-Levi of Karlin wrote, "If you want to raise a person from mud and filth, do not think it is enough to keep standing on top and reaching down to him a helping hand. You must go all the way down yourself, down into the mud and filth. Then take hold of him with strong hands and pull him and yourself out into the light."



While it is highly unlikely that the 18th century Rabbi Solomon had Mississippi mud and Biloxi filth in mind when he wrote the above statement, his words could hardly be more apt in describing what an individual or community's role can be in responding to the deepest of crises. Although it has been over thirty-six months since Hurricane Katrina hit, the storm's terrible impact can still be felt throughout the Gulf Coast region and, incredibly enough, the mud and filth have not yet been completely cleared away. While Biloxians have benefited enormously from the incredible generosity of

*Rabbi Annie Tucker graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Pennsylvania and received a Master's degree in Jewish Education from the Jewish Theological Seminary where she was ordained in May 2006. A Wexner Graduate Fellow, she currently serves as Assistant Rabbi of The Jewish Center, a large Conservative congregation in Princeton, NJ.*

communities around the country that have sent financial contributions and in-kind donations, there is simply something different about direct service. It is human relationship that has the power to transform penetrating darkness into the brightest of light!

For the past three years, my colleague Fran Amir and I have had the privilege of taking our 10<sup>th</sup> grade students on a five-day service trip to Biloxi, Mississippi. There have always been three goals to the program: to live out the Jewish value of *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world) that we emphasize so strongly in our religious school curriculum, to emphasize the concept of Jewish unity by exposing our group to a synagogue community very different from their own, and to provide a bonding experience for our students who graduate from religious school at the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade. I was fortunate enough to serve the Jewish community of Biloxi as a Student Rabbi during my last year of graduate school, and my congregation in Princeton has independent ties to the region since our previous Assistant Rabbi also worked there during her student years. As Fran (our religious school principal) and I set out to find opportunities for service, this special community felt like just the right match.

Although the itinerary of our trip has changed slightly from year to year, there are elements of our program that always stay the same. The bulk of our time, of course, is spent volunteering and we have done incredible projects—working with the local congregation Beth Israel to clean out their synagogue building, painting the Salvation Army volunteer village housed in Biloxi's former football stadium, partnering with an area minister to clean, paint, and remove debris from individual homes thereby allowing former occupants to move back in. We





always spend Shabbat with the Beth Israel congregation, joining together for dinner and prayer services and reinforcing the relationship between our two communities. And finally, we always make an effort to expose our students to the stories of real Biloxians—individuals who survived Katrina and can provide some perspective about the impact that the storm has had on the area. We have been lucky to meet for the last three years with Chad Lewis, a local musician and documentarian whose many messages

*Our annual trip  
is characterized  
not by what we  
give but rather  
what we get back.*

include the importance of resilience in the face of adversity, the healing power of community, and the incredible impact that volunteers can have in terms of helping individuals to feel less alone. Particularly as the events of Hurricane Katrina fade in peoples' memory or are

replaced by thoughts of Galveston, TX and other newly disadvantaged areas, it is important to remember that the work of restoring Biloxi is far from over. Our visits to Mississippi serve as a powerful reminder that this community has not been forgotten.

Over the past three years, Fran and I have seen enormous changes in the Biloxi region from the ubiquitous blue roof tarps and unremitting devastation of our first visit to the warped signs and driveways leading to nowhere of our second, remnants of homes and businesses that are no longer. On this last trip, just two months ago, we could see signs of improvement in the new houses built high on flood-resistant stilts

and the glitzy casinos—Biloxi's major tourist industry—again thriving and open for business. At the same time, we heard over and over again that there is still so much more work to do. The I-90 highway running parallel to the coast, is just now being repaired and hundreds of individuals are still in trailers or temporary homes, waiting for insurance money that may never come or paying off mortgages on homes that no longer exist but whose financial burden prevents them from buying elsewhere. As the national economy falters, businesses that left Biloxi in the wake of Katrina become less and less likely to return, adding to the unemployment that already exists from the hundreds of companies wiped out by the storm. The volunteers who flooded the Gulf Coast region post-Katrina have largely packed up and moved elsewhere, leaving residents with fewer resources and a feeling of abandonment. There is still so much more to do indeed!

For all that, I hope our presence in Biloxi has contributed; however, our annual trip is really characterized not by what we give but rather by what we get back—in terms of learning about a very different part of the country and the amazing people who live there, in terms of being exposed to human models of perseverance and resilience, in terms of having the opportunity to make a difference, however small, in an appreciative community. Perhaps the most significant element of our program is the impact it has had on our students who return to Princeton with a heightened sense of appreciation, an increased commitment towards service, and a sense that they have truly been part of something important. Their reflections follow:

*DAVID BORSACK, PRINCETON JUNCTION, 12<sup>TH</sup> GRADE*

During teacher convention week, I took a trip to Mississippi to help out at our sister synagogue in the town of Biloxi. Doing various hands-on tasks in the synagogue and helping to contribute has been and probably will be one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Traveling down to Biloxi and helping to rebuild a town after the disaster we have come to know as Katrina was a truly indescribable feeling. Also, even though so much has been done to help, visiting and seeing the destructiveness and the vast emptiness made me realize just how much still needed to be done.

*JULIA PERRY, BELLE MEAD, 12<sup>TH</sup> GRADE*

We live in a beautiful area that has nice homes, elegant shopping and places to go, and some of the best schools in the country. In Biloxi, many people don't have homes, schools, synagogues, or even something simple like a bridge! I never knew that people could live in such devastated conditions. This experience taught me to appreciate the things I have and the condition I live in much more than I ever have before. I never thought twice about how I was living, it was just so routine. I really never took the time to stop and think how lucky I am. I also learned a lot about how important the human spirit is for survival—the strength of people even when they are down and out is amazing. The determination that they had for rebuilding their town was truly inspiring to me. The people of Mississippi could have gathered their families and left the state, but they were devoted to their town and rebuilding it, so many of them decided to stick it out. I am so grateful that we were able to go there and help out. I only hope



that someday the people of Biloxi will be able to live like they did before Katrina hit.

*AVERY FAIGEN, PRINCETON, 12<sup>TH</sup> GRADE*

In November [of 2006], I got to be part of the Jewish Center trip to Biloxi. We worked at a synagogue named Beth Israel helping box up tallitot [prayer-shawls], siddurim [prayer books], tree of life [memorial] plaques, pictures and more into storage pods that could all then be transferred. What I remember most about accomplishing that deed was when the Jewish community that prayed at Beth Israel joined the group that I was with at our hotel to hold services. After we prayed, we ate, and then I remember one specific woman who pulled me aside. She told me how much it meant to her that we all came to help them and their synagogue. A tear in the corner of her eye started to form and she said, “You have done such a great deed and we will all be forever grateful. You made us feel like we were not forgotten.” That is what it means to me to be Jewish—to never forget and to never leave anyone out.

*Take hold of him with strong hands and pull him and yourself out into the light*—How much warmth and radiance is created when we help one another! With continued prayers for the people of Biloxi and all others who struggle. Amen.

# ILLUMINATIONS



Compassionate action starts with seeing yourself when you start to make yourself right and when you start to make yourself wrong. At that point you could just contemplate the fact that there is a larger alternative to either of those, a more tender, shaky kind of place where you could live.

*~ Pema Chodron*

The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.

*~ Mohandas K. Gandhi*

He who wishes to secure the good of others, has already secured his own.

*~ Confucius*

Walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.

*~ George Fox*

How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.

*~ Anne Frank*

Search and see if there is not some place where you may invest your humanity.

*~ Albert Schweitzer*

An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.

*~ Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Help your neighbor's boat across, and lo! your own has reached the shore.

*~ Hindu Proverb*

I love you my brother whoever you are whether you worship in your church, kneel in your temple, or pray in your mosque. You and I are all children of one faith, for the diverse paths of religion are fingers of the loving hand of one Supreme Being, a hand extended to all, offering completeness of spirit to all, eager to receive all.

*~ Kahlil Gibran*

We cannot live for ourselves alone. Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads, and along these sympathetic fibers, our actions run as causes and return to us as results.

*~ Herman Melville*

It is not speaking that breaks our silence but our unceasing anxiety to be heard.

*~ Thomas Merton*

The highest step and summit of charity's golden ladder is to assist your fellowman by teaching him a trade or putting him on the way of business so that he may earn an honest livelihood.

*~ Moses Maimonides*



# Bird Nests—Promises of Hope

Jean Wise



"I hate winter," I growled. "This time of year reminds me of dying and hopelessness." My mood reflected the dreary gray winter sky that blanketed northwest Ohio.

Why did I feel so gloomy and empty this year? Maybe it had something to do with the immense changes that recently occurred in my life. My family experienced a daughter's wedding, a son's college graduation and the moving of another daughter across two state lines. On top of the chaos with the kids, my husband's job stress increased and I retired from a fast-paced position after twenty-six years. The craziness of the multiple events and transitions drained all of my energy and left me empty.

Trapped inside my home for what seemed like another endless snowstorm, I began to pray. "What use is this emptiness, this dry spell, Lord? Help lift me out of this rut. Show me something to help me feel alive again."

I noticed them shortly after I uttered that prayer. Bird nests. My eyes were drawn to them. I saw them everywhere. Tree branches, now barren, allowed me to see them where they were hidden before.

Every time I looked up, multiple bird nests materialized. They beckoned me, "Look at me, I have something to tell you."

*Jean Wise is a freelance writer and Christian speaker at retreats, gatherings and seminars. She lives in Edon, OH with her husband enjoying their empty nest. Find out more at her website: [www.jeanwise.org](http://www.jeanwise.org)*

In God's mysterious way, I was invited to wonder about these empty and barren nests.

What did I see? The variety of sizes and shapes of nests fascinated me. From my front window, I counted at least four small nests very high in the branches. From the car window when I traveled, I noticed bigger nests resting in nooks in the skeletons of the trees. Every time I ventured outside, I hunted for a new one to observe.

They all varied in depth with some shallow and others quite deep. I saw one enormous, heavy-looking nest that was compacted with clay and twigs, hanging on the side of a steep hill. I noted that even with all the various appearances, all the nests were arrangements of sticks, grasses, and common plant material and all of them sat empty now in the dead of winter.

What were these bird nests telling me? *Lord, what are you teaching me?* I recorded all the details of the nests in my journal. I continued to pray to learn this mysterious lesson. *Lord, I am open to your lesson.*

One morning my devotions led me to Psalm 84:3: "My soul yearns, even faints for the court of the Lord; my heart and flesh cry out for the living God." This verse expressed my desperation, my hungering to experience the hope of God once again.

The verse continued with my answer and I began to understand. "Even the sparrow has found a home. And the swallow a nest for herself. Where she may have her young—a place near your altar, Oh Lord Almighty, my King and my God."

The nests were not just empty, but represented hollow vacant cups waiting to be filled. Instead of focusing on what they did not have, they remained open, ready to hold new life that was yet to come. These ordinary nests made of everyday stuff, though empty, slowly pulled me into a new realization. The nests symbolized a lesson that began to transform me to hear God's lesson.

The nest embodied God's promise of fresh beginnings in the next season. That simple change in my perspective permeated my soul. My feelings of being mired in dreariness and dryness disappeared. For the first time in a long time, I felt hope.

Our lives are like these nests, having seasons of production and times of rest. The ordinary everyday stuff like twigs of good times and laughter, straw of tears and tensions, soft down of love and community, and mud of confusion and change make up most of life's events. God's presence still exists even in the dreary season of winter while He is still quite actively preparing each of us for new growth.

God gave me a period of rest to renew my strength for a new season of life. My empty spirit, like the nests, waited while until the time was ripe to be filled again. As I became more accustomed to this idea, I began to discover other people's winter observations.

Richard Foster in his book titled *Prayer* writes, "Winter preserves and strengthens a tree. Rather than expending its strength on the exterior surface, its sap is forced deeper and deeper into its interior depth. In winter, a tougher more resilient life is firmly established. Winter is necessary for the tree to survive and flourish." My spirit rebounded with fresh inner growth during this season.

A farmer friend mentioned he planned to let one field take a break this year. "Let fallow ground rest," he explained. He would allow a portion of the field to lie dormant to give it a rest from the strains of growing crops. This season of rest enabled the soil to recapture the nutrients that had been taken out of it during the last growing season. My spirit drew strength from this time of rest.

Mark Twain wrote, "When a razor has seen long service and refuses to hold an edge, the barber lays it away for a few weeks, and the edge comes back of its own accord. We bestow thoughtful care upon inanimate objects, but none

upon ourselves. What a robust people, what a nation of thinkers we must be, if we would only lay ourselves on the shelf occasionally to renew our edges." My winter of "lying on the shelf" renewed me in new and unexpected ways.

Instead of a dry passage of time, I realized this period of drought allowed a time of rest in preparation for my next season of growth. God answered my prayer, not to take me out of this season, but to open my eyes to see its lessons. I learned to listen to what the bird nests taught me—to rest, renew and await new life. Like trees in winter, I grew deeper in my interior life. Like the fallow ground, I regained strength. Like the razor, I renewed my edge.

In my journal I wrote, "I fell in love with winter this year. The stark silhouettes of the barren trees against the gray skies; the sudden appearance and attraction to bird nests—hollow, empty—composed of ordinary stuff of life, waiting to be filled."

I originally only saw the emptiness and hopelessness in that dreary winter season. God led me to a new appreciation of this time and taught me a valuable lesson. Every winter since then, I search the barren trees for the bird nests. Instead of emptiness, I now see symbols of hope and promises of new expectant life.





# SPIRITUAL PRACTICE



## Service: The Path to Joy and Re-Creation

*Maggie Oman Shannon*

Serving others is encouraged in every major world religion. Indeed, scriptures from all faith traditions not only emphasize service, but extol it as the epitome of human achievement. In Jainism, it is taught that “rendering help to another is the function of all human beings” (*Tattvarthasutra* 5.21). Islam teaches that service is the pinnacle of actualization: “The best of men are those who are useful to others” (Hadith of Bukhari). Confucianism sees service not as a means to an end, but as a natural outgrowth of spiritual evolution: “The man of perfect virtue wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others” (*Analects* 6.28.2).

And if, as the Talmud teaches, “all men are responsible for one another” (Sanhedrin 27b), then exactly how are we to go about demonstrating this responsibility? Jesus exemplified the calling very tangibly—if not necessarily literally—in John 13:12-16: “When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ he asked them. . . . ‘Now that I, your Lord and Teacher,

*Maggie Oman Shannon is a spiritual director and writer with special interests in practices that nourish the soul. Excerpted from The Way We Pray © 2001 Conari Press and used with permission. [www.conaripress.com](http://www.conaripress.com)*

have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.'" A modern spiritual master, Mahatma Gandhi, would see such a simple act as every bit as vital as something done on a larger scale. He taught that "no matter how small what you do may seem, it's vitally important that you do it.

Yet service may not be quite as simple as it seems—for in order to truly be of service, one must let go of one's own expectations for recognition, acknowledgment, any conscious or unconscious feelings of superiority or power, even one's own views about what should happen as a result of the service. Service is not only about what you do, but how and why you do it—it must come from a place of integrity, gratitude and love.

#### **SUGGESTIONS FOR GIVING SERVICE:**

Think about those around you—do you have an aging parent or neighbor who needs help? Write down some ideas for what you could do for them—or do more regularly—that would be of service.

Consider giving service anonymously. List what kind of helpful acts you can do—and not be discovered.

Do what is meaningful to you, and don't think service only comes in big packages. Think small: Mother Teresa taught that love is doing small things greatly. Smiling at people on the street, holding doors open, picking up litter are all ways of being in service.

# Stranger God

Marilyn Lacey



Hospitality to strangers figured prominently in biblical cultures. The Hebrew people knew from their own history what it meant to be exiles, wayfarers depending on the kindness of others. Consequently, reciprocal kindness was woven into their moral code. Not that it was easy!

Perhaps that's why the command appears so often—to remind us, to goad us, to impress upon us that this is how God acts, so this is how we must act:

For the LORD, your God . . . mighty and awesome . . . has no favorites, accepts no bribes . . . executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and befriends the alien, feeding and clothing him. So you too must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. (Dt 10:17-20)

The practice of offering hospitality to strangers wasn't merely an obedient response to a command. It evolved out of the lived experience of the Jewish people: Extending

*Marilyn Lacey, R.S.M. has worked with refugees for the past twenty-five years. In 2008 she founded the nonprofit Mercy Beyond Borders. Excerpted from This Flowing Toward Me: A Story of God Arriving In Strangers, © 2009 Ave Maria Press and used with permission. [www.avemariepress.com](http://www.avemariepress.com)*

welcome to the strangers in their midst was literally seen as one way of meeting God. Creating space for strangers, inviting them into one's own circle of friends and family — this was a concrete way of encountering the Holy One.

The poet D.H. Lawrence, while acknowledging that fear is our normal response to strangers, hints that blessings await those who risk opening their door to the stranger's knock:

What is the knocking?

What is the knocking at the door in the night?

It is somebody wants to do us harm.

No, no, it is the three strange angels.

Admit them. Admit them.

The poet was alluding to the intriguing story narrated in the book of Genesis, Chapter 18. In this incident Abraham sees three strangers at a distance, walking along. He dashes after them, calling out and begging them not to walk on past his tent, but instead to come and receive his hospitality. The writer notes that Abraham (not withstanding his status as an elder) literally bows down to the ground before these strangers. He pleads with them: "Please, come be refreshed and enjoy a meal with us." As the story unfolds, it turns out that these three men are actually messengers of God. In the ensuing conversation they reveal that Abraham's elderly wife Sarah will not longer remain barren, but will bear them a son who will in turn found a great nation. It couldn't be more plain, really—an act of hospitality to the stranger plays a key role in the founding of the people of Israel.

Hospitality is so culturally important to Abraham that, even though these three strangers had not asked for rest or water or assistance, Abraham is appalled by the



prospect that they might simply walk past his tent without stopping. He has to jump up, flag them down, cajole them into staying: "Please, this matters to me! You must become my guests. Do me this favor! It would be an insult if you did not allow me to share all that I have with you. Seat yourselves right here in the shade. Stay awhile. Let my servants prepare a meal for you . . . ." Centuries later, reflecting on this story, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews wrote to the first-generation Christians, "Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels." (Heb 13:2)

In the Scriptures, the stranger is not simply someone who needs our hospitality: the stranger is the one who actually *brings us blessings*. If we have eyes to see, the roles of giver and receiver reverse and the stranger reveals the divine presence to us. In the person of the other, the alien, we may meet the God who is always "other," always beyond what we can think or imagine. And if we are open to such encounters, there is the chance for unexpected blessings. Speaking of God, St. John of the Cross wrote, "He passed through these groves in haste, scattering a thousand blessings, and left them, by his glance alone, clothed in beauty." In my experience, this is what God is *always* doing—passing through our lives, scattering blessings—but in our busyness we rarely stop long enough to notice them, to cherish them, or to give thanks for them.

Blessings are God's constant outflowings of love, attracting us and in the process making us attractive. Blessings are the presence of God flowing into us and through us, uniting us with one another and all creation. The effect of blessing is always to bring together, to reconcile, to unite, to enable us to see people as their best

selves (namely, as beloved of God). And when we know ourselves to be blessed, then we in turn can bless others.

In Nong Khai refugee camp, 14,000 persons lived in unnaturally crowded conditions, allotted a mere eighteen inches of living space per person. I learned a great deal there about hospitality and about blessings. When it came time for the new year, I asked one of the young men how the Lao people traditionally celebrated the holiday. I will never forget his response: “Oh, we go from house to house saying blessings.” How different the world might be if we all spent some time going from house to house, from person to person, spreading blessings.

To mark life’s transitions (births, weddings, comings and goings) the Lao people always have a *baci*—a ceremony wherein the honored guests sits next to a bouquet of elegantly arranged flowers from which hang thin white strings. One by one, each person at the celebration comes up to the honoree, kneels down in front of him/her, takes a string from the bouquet, and ties it around the person’s wrist while speaking a spontaneous blessing. The strings remain on the person’s wrist for the next three days as a sign of blessings being carried, a remembrance of who bestowed them, and evidence that we are all “tied” to one another.

I invite the reader to sit with any of the wonderful hospitality stories found in the traditions of all great religions. Mull them over; ask God for insight into them. Then ask for courage to take small steps in expanding your own circle of hospitality. These might be as tentative as smiling at the stranger in line with you at the grocery store, as deliberate as hosting a get-together for all the strangers in your apartment building, or as dramatic as volunteering to foster an unaccompanied refugee child in your own home. It might not cost you much, or it might mean going out on a limb:

Can you imagine yourself during Thanksgiving dinner speaking up to your brother-in-law in defense of the undocumented, pointing out that, really, everyone is kin to us, and everyone has a human right to live where they can support their own family?

An ancient proverb describes Abraham's tent as being "open on all four sides." It's a gracious image, worth pondering. How open are we "on all sides" to being surprised by the strangers whom we encounter? How willing are we to invite them in? *Tent*, of course, is an English word; the Latin equivalent is *tabernaculum*—holy dwelling place of God on earth. From the very earliest stories of Judeo-Christian faith, God has appeared as the stranger. Why should it be any different today? Welcome a stranger into your tent; it may become a tabernacle.



# P O E T R Y



## Sophia

God sings wisdom through all creation, carried on  
the winter winds and soft spring rains.

Wisdom ripples over wheatfields, tosses autumn  
leaves about and rides on sultry summer air.

Waves and waves burst forth forever,  
deep calls unto deep; living water penetrates the  
very roots of human nature, calling out: "Rise,  
stand tall and live!"

Wisdom, ageless, yet ever new, "ripe-appled"  
goodness, bearing a woman's name,  
guiding all who turn to her, feminine face of the  
great "I am." Sophia, holy Wisdom, resplendent,  
shining, blowing wildly, flowing gently,  
god-air everywhere.

~ Nancy M. Welsh

*Nancy M. Welsh, a Sister of St. Joseph for forty-five years, has taught elementary school and served as a pastoral assistant. She currently enjoys volunteering and devoting time to the art of writing.*



## Dream Journeys in Manitoba

Before sleep the faces come.  
People I have never known  
stare into my eyes,  
hair over their foreheads.  
So earnest, so serious, so loving,  
their gazes share knowledge  
I am unaware of, or have forgotten.

The poplar trees, spare and tall,  
with topknots like bush hair,  
reach branches and trunks, as white as snow,  
up to touch the holy one  
and play in spirit winds from his hands.

*~Hilary Thompson*

## Credo

Everything perishes  
Nothing is lost  
More is here than appears  
Life is the question  
and answer  
in our moment  
within Eternal Now

*~ Charles H. Harper*

*After retiring from teaching at Acadia University in Nova Scotia, Hilary Thompson began a spiritual guidance program. Today, she continues that work while coping with a brain tumor.*

*Charles H. Harper served as a pastor for over thirty-nine years of ministry with the United Church of Christ in Boston. His new book of poetry, Sorting Things Out is now available.*



## Cobwebs

### Cobwebs

Gently and quietly spun—  
Threads so fine as to almost be invisible,  
Yet strong against the wind  
That seeks to tear them from their place.  
They hold the dew of morning,  
Sparkling in the sun like strands of silver  
Holding diamonds suspended in their place.  
Heartstrings are like that  
When woven in sincerity  
From heart to heart.

~ Barbara Aldrich

*Barbara Aldrich resides in rural Nevada. She is a mother of six children and three stepchildren. She serves as a volunteer E.M.T. and publishes an online newsletter for her community.*

## A REFLECTION



### Los Angeles Catholic Worker

*Douglas Wagner*



The most important thing in my life and in my spirituality is service. I was born and raised a Catholic, even serving as an altar boy, but there was a time in my twenties when I became a bit disgruntled with the institutional church. An experience of service was part of the series of events that brought me back to my faith.

I remember I was living in Chicago and having a difficult time when I decided one day to take a break from myself and focus on others who were in much worse shape than me—people I knew who were living on the streets. On my own, I distributed some food and soon realized I felt really good to have taken care of someone else's needs rather than my own. From that day forward, I started to come back to my faith.

When I later moved to Los Angeles, I discovered the Catholic Worker Movement. I started to go to their kitchen regularly to help, and this became a deep and meaningful experience for me. Catholic Workers are, by and large, focused on serious social justice issues. When people ask me about the kitchen I tell them the community there is similar to the

*Douglas Wagner has a Ph.D. in experimental psychology from the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. He currently resides in Los Angeles and works as a Crime & Intelligence Analyst with the LAPD. He has been a Catholic Worker volunteer since 1999 and is affiliated with the Secular Franciscan Order.*

radical Christian communities that formed immediately following the time of Jesus. Sometimes when I go to the kitchen one of the Workers will be missing and I find out that person is in prison for protesting. Catholic Workers are a great group of people who put themselves on the line for what they believe.

I have positive experiences with the guests I serve. Sometimes, their eyes light up, and they exude so much warmth and love. On the flip side, sometimes people come in holding a great deal of anger which can feel like a negative experience. I recall this quote from St. Vincent de Paul in one of the prayers we say to begin our day of service: *"They are your masters...the more unjust and insulting, the more love you must give them. It is only for your love alone that the poor will forgive you the bread you give to them."* Once on the serving line when someone became very angry at me, I remembered these words and felt a certain peace. This kitchen isn't about people casually coming in smiling and saying, "Thanks," like you might have at Starbucks. This is about people coming in with all their pains and joys. It is a wonderfully intense environment where Jesus can be seen in both the beautiful and the difficult.



# What Nourishes Your Soul?

*Laurie Blefeld*



At the very core of our being far beneath the surface of who we are, lies the pure soul, that part of each of us that is Goodness. This pure soul is not distinct to each individual. We share a collective soul, all of us, interconnected, with a shared essential Goodness from which we all were created and to which we all belong. But it is the shape of each soul that is unique. No one else feels your life the way you do. No one else sees or hears the world the way you do. Your very essence, your essential Goodness, lies like a carefully planted seed within the quiet Light of your heart. It is from that seed where all feeling is born, where the beauty of the soul comes alive. What begins in the mind as an idea becomes a thought. What emerges as a thought goes on to be an action. But when our thoughts move first through the Light in our hearts, then our actions come from a place of feeling aligned with our inherent Goodness. You know and you feel when your actions are off, those times when you say things you wish you hadn't said or do things you wish you hadn't done.

*Laurie Blefeld is a spiritual director and counselor for individuals and families who have experienced domestic violence and sexual assault, and most recently counsels incarcerated women at a Connecticut correctional facility.*

You also feel when your soul's compass is in alignment with the Self you were created to be.

What is it then that nourishes the soul? When I think of the metaphor of the seed, I remember the morning glory seeds I planted early this summer. I placed them carefully in the soil and made sure there was plenty of sunshine and water. In the darkness beneath the ground, the Mystery began. Out of sight, each tiny seed began to open. Ever so slightly, leaves began to form like hands folded in prayer, until one day they poked their way right up through the soil. The journey from seed to vine to bud to flower had begun. But it was the seeds' *receptivity* to the nourishment in the soil, to the water and the light that invited growth and transformation.

Likewise, when we look closely at the unfolding of the soul's journey, we discover that it is our own willingness to receive that opens us to connection with the world around us and with each other, and allows for growth within our inner landscape. When we pause and take a moment to be aware, we are really performing an invocation to the Holy One to be present in our everyday activities. In our often too busy days, we tend to turn off our receptivity and openness, choosing instead to rush through the tasks of the day. Perhaps the most common form of violence is allowing ourselves to be carried away by the doing, too many commitments and the pressure of too many demands. The frenzy destroys our own inner capacity for simply being. We become distracted and miss receiving the gift of the butterfly, the sound of raindrops on the roof, or a gentle kiss on the cheek like the brush of fairy wings.

My soul finds nourishment in silence. I think I always knew that on some intuitive level. Years ago when my four

children were little, I began what came to be an early morning ritual of inviting stillness. There is an old, tattered chair in my living room that sits in front of the window facing east. My ritual of sitting in the chair each morning before sunrise was born out of necessity, I am quite certain, for centering and peace in my busy household. It was a quiet place to nurse babies, sip coffee, to read and write notes to friends. It was perhaps the only quiet time of the day before the million billion tasks of motherhood took precedence.

Just exactly when my chair became a sacred place that had acquired meaning far beyond just a chair, will always be part of the Mystery. But simply sitting in that chair

<i>The intimacy</i>	looking out to the horizon
<i>we share</i>	where the sun greets the
<i>best reveals</i>	morning invites a sense of
<i>the face of God.</i>	peacefulness, an opening of my
	heart. I don't remember which
	child first called it the Prayer
	Chair or which one named the
	living room the "loving room."

But somehow we all knew that in that room, sitting in that chair, we were on holy ground. The feeling was palpable. When the kids were growing up and a tender heart needed to be held, it happened in that chair. During school years, spelling words were practiced while sitting in that chair. For a while the chair was called "the 92 chair" because somehow if you studied in that chair you were guaranteed at least a 92. During teenage years, I spent many a late night sitting the white-knuckled-vigil in that chair, praying, rather pleading, for the safe return home of a child out long after curfew. My kids all knew, in fact counted on, that I would begin each day in my

chair. Over the years there were early morning notes left for me written from a tender heart, sometimes about a new love, sometimes asking forgiveness when harsh words had been spoken, sometimes a thank-you for bailing them out of a tight situation, or a simple request to put soccer shorts in the dryer.

It is now many years later and my prayer chair ritual continues, always shifting and being recreated as I move along this journey called *life*. But it continues to be silence that nourishes my soul's growth and transformation. By silence I don't mean the absence of sound, but rather a daily meditation practice in which I turn towards Guidance in the spaciousness of quiet. With intention, I practice clearing away the mind clutter and invite interior stillness into my heart, thereby opening my soul to receive. It is an exercise in aligning my mind with my heart, and like all exercise, sometimes takes discipline to drag myself out of bed in the morning! But for the most part, my practice has helped me to be more mindful throughout the day, and more present to everything around me. I am more "awe-wake" to those moments of awe that take my breath away, that quickening in my heart that simply says, YES. When we get quiet, we begin to know who we are and what we love. I often think we could really know each other in a deeper, more meaningful way if we were to asked each other, "What do you love?" rather than "What do you do?" Developing a habit of receptivity attunes us to the currents of our lives. As we become more conscious of ourselves and others, our capacity to love and receive love continually expands. The intimacy we share when we are completely present to another, when we "take off our shoes" and receive one another, is the experience that, for me, best reveals the face of God.





This past winter I was fortunate to travel throughout India on a guided spiritual tour to many of the holiest sights in the world. But what moved me most of all was not the temples, or the teaching by the Dalai Lama on a picturesque mountain top in the Himalayas, or witnessing the sacred funeral sites along the Ganges River. I went half way around the world to discover that my soul is nourished most of all in those moments when I am receptive to connection, heart to heart. When my eyes met those of another whose color and dress and language were different from mine, we bowed, pressed our hands together and greeted each other with the loveliest of words, "Namaste," which means, I honor the God within you which is also in me. In that brief and sacred exchange, eye to eye and heart to heart, we received each other. We were present to the mutual recognition of the luminosity within each other. Amazing that such a simple gesture invites connection between people on a level beneath our exterior.

What do you love? What is your heart's desire? What is it that brings you into the fullness of who you were created to be? How do you nourish that part of your whole and holy Self? I am reminded of the words from Mary Oliver's poem entitled *Messenger*.

My work is loving the world.  
here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird —  
equal seekers of sweetness.  
Let me keep my mind on what matters,  
which is my work,  
which is mostly standing still and learning  
to be astonished.

## END PIECE



### Who Visits the Poor?

*Rabindranath Tagore*

The day came for an image from the Hindu temple to be drawn around the town in its chariot. The Queen said to the King, "Let us go and attend the festival."

Only one man out of the whole household did not join in the pilgrimage. His work was to collect stalks of speargrass to make brooms for the King's house. The chief of the servants said in pity to him, "You may come with us." But he bowed his head, saying "No, thank you, it cannot be."

This same man dwelt by the road along which the King's followers had to pass. And when the Minister's elephant reached this spot, the Minister called to him and said "Come with us and see the God ride his chariot!"

But the man quietly replied, "I dare not seek after God in the King's fashion."

How should you ever have such luck again as to see the God ride in his chariot?" asked the Minister.

"Ah, when God himself comes to my door," answered the man.

At this the Minister laughed out loud, saying, "Fool! You think God will come to your door! Yet a King must travel far to see him!"

And the man answered, "Who but God visits the poor?"

*Rabindranath Tagore was an Indian mystic, author, and proponent of social reform. This Hindu story is excerpted from The Fugitive and Other Poems.*

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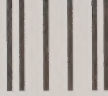
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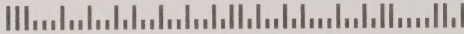
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